



Pay by Bag – a SMART Program Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is SMART?

A: Save-Money-And Reduce Trash (SMART) is a system by which you pay for the household trash you discard. **There is no charge for recycling.** You pay only for your own trash disposal, not that of others. Businesses will continue to pay the cost of their trash disposal. The fundamental principle is that people are responsible for their own trash disposal costs and that, since recycling is free, a SMART system creates a financial incentive to recycle.

Q: What are the benefits of implementing a SMART program?

A: The benefits are twofold: economic and environmental. Trash disposal costs are rising. In 2009, Hopkinton and Webster residents sent 3,015 tons of trash to the incinerator. With a similar volume in 2010 and a rate of \$74.10 for tipping and transportation fees, Hopkinton can expect to pay \$223,412. Also, as fuel costs rise, transportation costs will undoubtedly increase as well. Recycling saves on trash disposal costs and can generate revenue, saving tax dollars. Environmentally, less waste results in less pollution generated by incineration. Recycling also saves valuable resources and energy, resulting in fewer greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming and threaten our environment.

Q: How does SMART provide a more equitable solution to trash disposal?

A: Currently, the cost of solid waste disposal is paid for by local property taxes. Residents can throw away as much as they like, and the entire cost must be covered by this tax. This means that residents who throw away less trash subsidize those who throw away greater amounts of trash. There's little incentive to conserve when others in town help subsidize wasteful practices. Under SMART, these costs are covered by a per-bag payment, and **there is no fee for recycling**, so SMART provides an economic incentive to residents who reduce their trash volume and recycle more. Experience in other towns shows that SMART increases recycling significantly.

Q: When SMART starts, will I be paying more or less?

A: The greater the level of recycling, the greater the savings. Most households should pay less under SMART.

Q: Won't I be paying twice for trash disposal -- once through taxes and again when I buy SMART bags?

A: NO. The majority of waste management costs will be paid for through the sale of the bags, thus offsetting the tax burden. Proceeds from bag sales will go to support only waste management and will not become part of the general fund. Any waste management expenses not covered by revenue from the bags will be covered by general taxation.

Q: Why shouldn't I get as many free services as possible from the Town?

A: Town services are never 'free' - you pay for them through your property tax. The idea that trash disposal is or ever was 'free' is an illusion resulting from the fact that disposal costs are incorporated in the tax bill. SMART is merely a shift in the way people pay for trash disposal. **It is NOT an added fee. Revenue from bag sales will go into a special account to offset the taxes currently paid for trash disposal.** One of the reasons SMART works is that it makes it clear to everyone that trash disposal costs money.

Q: Since all taxpayers subsidize schools whether or not they have children in the schools, why shouldn't all taxpayers subsidize trash collection even if they aren't generating much trash?

A: Most taxpayers are willing to subsidize education because they feel that it's in the public interest. Generating more trash is not in the public interest -- quite the opposite.

Q: How much will the bags cost?

A: Prices, estimated based on current costs, will be \$1.25 per 33-gallon bag and .75 cents per 13-gallon bag.

Q: How much and how often can the bag fee be raised?

A: Fees will not exceed the cost of trash disposal. We are currently paying those costs through our property taxes. SMART will simply change the manner in which those costs are distributed and assessed. The town's overall cost will decrease as recycling increases, resulting in a net savings to the taxpayers as a whole.

Q: How do we know that SMART will reduce trash volume and increase recycling?

A: According to the EPA, the average waste reduction reported by SMART communities is between 25% and 45%.

Q: Will SMART result in problems with illegal dumping?

A: Experience has shown that any increase in illegal dumping is negligible and short-lived, if it occurs at all. Enforcement of littering laws will address illegal dumping.

Q: Do people in other communities like Pay by Bag/SMART?

A: In every community where SMART is proposed, there are residents who are certain they won't like the program. But once residents see the program in action, it receives strong support from a majority of people, largely because of its cost savings and inherent fairness. **None of the 47 communities in New Hampshire have ever voted to rescind SMART.**

Q: How do we know that SMART won't be overly complicated or inconvenient?

A: A SMART program will be easy to understand and use. Specially marked SMART trash bags will be available at local stores. Only trash in SMART bags will be accepted. **Recyclables will not need to be put in SMART bags.** They are recycled at no cost. Also, certain bulky items that would be difficult and costly to put in SMART bags and that are only occasionally disposed of, (such as Styrofoam packing) would be taken at no charge. Common sense and reasonableness will assure the program is implemented fairly.

Q: Will SMART benefit senior citizens?

A: Since senior citizens tend to have very modest trash output, they are currently subsidizing other households. The great majority of senior citizens will see their trash disposal expenses go down with SMART, since they will come closer to paying only for the limited services they require. Provisions will be made to assist seniors who need help with recycling, both through volunteer efforts and by establishing a conveniently located drop-off site.

Q: Won't SMART impose an unfair burden on low-income residents?

A: No. Low-income residents will also share in the overall savings achieved by SMART, and because SMART restores some measure of individual control over the trash bill, households that need to economize are given the option to do so. On balance, SMART is advantageous to low-income households. Additionally, subsidies will be made available through the Human Services Department. Low-income families who qualify for assistance will be provided with a certain number of bags at no charge or for a reduced fee. Generally, this number would be based on the average number used by a family of the same size that recycles.

Q: Will SMART be unfair to large families?

A: It's important to separate concerns about large families from concerns about low-income households. Consider turning the argument around. Has it been fair all these years for small disposers to subsidize large disposers through property taxes? Opportunities to reduce waste are available to all households (recycling, composting, etc.), and those who do so can get control over a bill they previously couldn't reduce. All households, regardless of size have opportunities to reduce. In most communities, large households do not generally receive discounts on water service, groceries, or other services that might also vary by family size. Trash output is correlated more with rising income and lifestyle choices than family size. The amount of unavoidable trash generated by larger families is not great enough to impose a hardship. In fact, if a family is careful with its trash, even large families can realize a savings under SMART.

Q: What about people who currently use barrels instead of bags?

A: All trash must be in a SMART bag. You may place the filled SMART bag in a barrel while waiting for pickup.

Q: Will SMART cause residents to use more plastic bags? If so, isn't this an environmental problem?

A: Under SMART, some residents will use more bags, but many will use fewer. This occurs because, under SMART, residents tend to put more trash in each bag, and as recycling increases, trash bag use decreases. We are not yet sure how SMART will affect the total number of bags used. Since a typical trash bag weighs about 1 ounce, this is relatively minor compared to the significant tonnage reduction expected from SMART.

Q: How sturdy are the bags?

A: The bags are 1.5 millimeters thick which is almost twice the thickness of a regular kitchen trash bag, and heavier than most 33-gallon bags. According to the SMART bag manufacturer, the 33-gallon bag is rated for 35 pounds and the 13-gallon bag is rated for 15 pounds. There should be no problem with the performance of the bags, when used as intended.

Q: What about really big items like refrigerators, TVs and furniture?

A: These and other bulky items, along with building materials and hazardous waste, will be handled the same way as they are now. TV sets and computer monitors are currently recycled.

Q: Where can I get more information?

A: Contact any member of the Recycling Committee. Hopkinton committee members include Debbie Augustine, Judy Fayre , Denis Goddard, Ginni Haines, Bob LaPree, Mary Leadbeater and Katherine Mitchell.